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ABSTRACT

High and low self-monitors were given the task of applying for a position that was or was not a good fit with their personality. Subjects were 97 introductory psychology students who had previously taken the 18-item Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS). They took the SMS again--as if it were being used to decide whether they would be offered a very desirable job--and were instructed to answer the questions to make the best impression on the employer and maximize their chances of being offered the job. Subjects were assigned to a job by means of a random distribution of a booklet containing the job advertisements, SMS, and other scales. They rated how good a fit the job was with their true personality, how different their answers were from their true selves, how easy or difficult it was to answer the question, the extent to which they felt like hypocrites, and how successful they thought they were in making a good impression. A final page contained 20 exploratory semantic differential scales on which subjects rated how they typically feel presenting themselves in the best possible light in a job interview. Results were consistent with prior research findings on self-monitoring differences in self-presentational behavior but extended those findings to the affective realm. Low self-monitors found it difficult to "put on an act" and experienced "emotional dissonance" and a diminished sense of well-being. High self-monitors did not experience the same negative affective consequences. (YLB)

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Self-Monitors Apply for a Job: Self-Presentation and Affective Consequences

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Presenting oneself as the right person for the job regardless of whether you truly feel that way is generally considered appropriate and even desirable behavior in an interview situation. However, individuals, especially high and low self-monitors, differ in their motivation and ability to control the way they come across to others (see Snyder 1979, 1987 for reviews). Low self-monitors, who value being true to themselves, typically respond to situations in a manner consistent with their inner feelings and beliefs; it may be difficult for them to act in ways they do not feel, and interviews as well as other screening devices such as personality tests may thus produce negative affect. By contrast, high self-monitors are particularly adept at controlling their expressive and self-presentational behavior, and for them interviews and tests may represent merely another opportunity to demonstrate their performance skills. Despite the obvious relevance of self-monitoring theory to the job application context, remarkably little research has been conducted on high and low self-monitors' self-presentation (Snyder & Copeland, 1989) and, most important, their affective reactions in situations of such potential conflict.

In this study high and low self-monitors were given the task of applying for a position that was or was not a good fit with their personality. After reading a job description they were to give the "right answers" on a test that would get them the job. We hypothesized that low self-monitors, disposed to present themselves accurately, should have difficulty doing this for a job that did not fit their personality. In this "poor fit" situation they should have more difficulty answering the questions and experience

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heightened negative affect, e.g., feel more like a hypocrite, and feel that they have made a poor impression. High self-monitors, by contrast, should view any job application situation simply as an opportunity to exercise their impression management skills and facility with situationally appropriate behaviors. Thus, in a job situation that might be expected to be a "poor fit" for high self-monitors, they should not have the same difficulties or experience the same negative affect as low self-monitors.

Method

Subjects: Subjects were 97 introductory psychology students who had previously taken the 18-item Self-Monitoring (SM) Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986) in a mass testing session conducted several weeks prior to the experiment.

Procedure: Subjects took an "Employer's Test," - the SM scale again - as if it were being used to decide whether they would be offered a very desirable job. They were instructed to answer the questions "in such a way as to make the best impression on the employer and maximize your chances of being offered the Job." Two jobs were described in the form of help wanted ads designed for high and low self-monitors. The high SM job cited communication, social skills, flexibility in interacting with diverse types of people in different situations. The low SM job referred to personal integrity and behavior consistent with principles and beliefs. Subjects were assigned to job by means of random distribution of a booklet which contained the job advertisements, the SM measure, and other scales. They then rated how good a fit the job was with their true personality, how different their answers were from true self, and how easy or difficult it was to answer the questions. They also rated the extent to which they felt like a hypocrite in this type of situation, and how successful they thought they were in making a good impression. A

final page contained 20 exploratory semantic differential scales on which subjects rated how they typically feel presenting themselves in the best possible light in a job interview. Based on a factor analysis, 12 items with loadings over .40 (e.g., confident-unsure, strong-weak, success-failure, valuable-worthless, relaxed-nervous, etc.) were combined to assess a generalized view of self in job interview situations, i.e., an "interview self-concept" (alpha =.94).

Results and Discussion: Our major focus is on low self-monitors' affective responses to applying for a job that is a "poor fit with their personality. To check that the high SM job was a "poor fit" for low self-monitors, we correlated SM scores and rating of goodness of fit for the high SM job and found $r(49) = .34$, $p < .009$, confirming that low SMs thought the job fit their personality significantly less well than did high SMs. Also, a correlation of $r = .41$, $p < .002$ was found between SM scores and rating of how similar the Employer's Test answers were to their true self: the lower the SM score, the less were these answers perceived to be true to self. To examine low self-monitors' affective reactions to these disparities, SM scores were correlated with relevant dependent measures for the "poor fit" job. Low SM was associated with more difficulty answering the questions ($r = .45$), feeling like a hypocrite ($r = .34$), and with perceiving themselves to have made a poor impression ($r = .23$, $p = .05$). //

We also correlated SM scores with the dependent variables in the low SM job condition. Here SM was not significantly associated with goodness of fit ($r = .10$, n.s.) or with ratings of how similar answers were to true self ($r = .13$, n.s.). This is what would be expected if high SMs were not concerned with the difference between job types. Supporting this interpretation, high SMs rated both jobs as an equally good fit with their

personality, Ms = 5.09 vs. 4.77, $t(42)$ $t(42) < 1$, n.s., and did not differ between jobs in their ratings of how similar test answers were to their true self, Ms = 5.23 vs. 4.72, $t(42) = 1.53$, n.s. Unlike the high SM job situation, there was not significant associated of SM with goodness of impression or with feeling like a hypocrite. Finally, whether looked at overall or separately by job, high SM was significantly associated with a greater perceived probability of being hired (overall $r = .25$, $p < .01$), and with a positive interview self-concept (overall $r = .29$, $p < .05$), reflecting, perhaps, high SMs' greater confidence in their impression management skills.

Conclusions and Implications: These results are consistent with prior research findings on self-monitoring differences in self-presentational behavior but extend those findings to the affective realm. Although low self-monitors may try to adopt self-presentational norms for interview behavior, because they are motivated to be true to themselves it is difficult for them "to put on an act." As a result they may not make a good impression, and, even if they do, they are likely to experience "emotional dissonance" (Hochschild, 1983) and a diminished sense of well-being as a consequence of the heightened disparity between their self and their self-expression. High self-monitors, on the other hand, readily take on roles and display situationally appropriate behaviors without experiencing these same negative affective consequences.

These observations create a paradox of potential importance in actual hiring situations: people who can "put on" behaviors like smiling, nodding, hiding negative emotions, etc., (high self-monitors) are more likely to receive job offers than those who wear more neutral expressions and smile less (low self-monitors) (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; see also, Forbes & Jackson, 1980; Imada & Hakel, 1977; McGovern & Tinsley,

1978). However, these job getting skills may not predict actual job performance. Thus, if employee selection relies primarily on interviews and other devices subject to impression management, a low self-monitor may have less of a chance of getting a job that he or she may actually be better at then a high self-monitor. Employers take note.

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